

Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and
Domestic Violence
Council of Europe
Avenue de l'Europe F-67075
Strasbourg Cedex
France

17 April 2023

**RE: Supplementary information in relation to Ireland's first baseline evaluation under the
Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and
domestic violence**

Dear GREVIO members,

I write on behalf of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission ('the Commission') in connection with Ireland's first baseline evaluation under the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ('Istanbul Convention'). This correspondence follows our close engagement throughout the baseline evaluation procedure, including through the publication of a policy statement on Ireland's ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2019,¹ submission of a comprehensive parallel report in 2022,² engagement with GREVIO during the evaluation visit in 2023, and the submission of follow-up information. The purpose of this letter is to share information which has recently come to light in relation to domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence in the Irish Defence Forces.

On 28 March 2023, the Report of the Independent Review Group on Dignity and Equality issues in the Defence Forces was published by the Department of Defence.³ The report highlights current and ongoing patterns of unacceptable behaviour including bullying, discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. It identifies a "culture of discrimination towards women," including hypermasculinities and deeply misogynistic

¹ IHREC, [Statement on the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2019).

² IHREC, [Ireland and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2023).

³ Department of Defence, [Report of the Independent Review Group on Dignity and Equality issues in the Defence Forces](#) (2023).

attitudes. In relation to the investigation of complaints, the system is found to be profoundly lacking, with victims and survivors describing the consequences of reporting as “potentially career ending”.

Key data contained in the report is set out below:

- The report identifies a number of patterns of unacceptable behaviour in the Defence Forces, including: sexualised language; sexual gesticulating; indecent exposure; spiking alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks with drugs; grooming; physical assault; sexual assault; and rape.
- In a benchmarking survey accompanying the report,⁴ 25% of respondents reported experiences of sexual harassment. 88% of those who reported experiencing sexual harassment were female.
- 76% of survey respondents who experienced unwanted physical contact or sexual assault did not report the incident(s). The main reason for not reporting was that the respondent did not think there was any point. Of those who reported instances of unwanted physical contact or sexual assault, no respondent (0%) felt satisfied with the outcome.
- The report notes the Department of Defence’s assurance that An Garda Síochána has been involved in investigating incidents of child sexual abuse and that two of the complaints were submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions. However, the authors of the report were not aware of any prosecutions which had taken place or which are currently ongoing.

In a press release accompanying the publication of the report, the Minister for Defence noted that the report “signals the critical need for fundamental and immediate cultural change”,⁵ and has agreed to progress the report’s recommendations, including establishment of a statutory inquiry and External Oversight Body, as a matter of priority.⁶ Ireland’s national police force, An Garda Síochána, has established a dedicated operation to oversee all investigations into allegations of sexual assault within the Defence Forces. Our Chief Commissioner, Sinéad Gibney, expressed her disturbance in reading and hearing the words of those who suffered hugely while serving their country, and commended the women who came forward to share difficult personal stories.⁷

In our parallel report to GREVIO, we noted the unique historical context of violence against women and children in Ireland, which is characterised by a legacy of patriarchal institutional

⁴ As part of the work of the Independent Review Group, a benchmarking survey was sent to serving members of the Defence Forces between June-July 2022, which received 527 responses. Department of Defence, [Independent Review Group: Final Report to the Minister for Defence – Appendices](#) (2023).

⁵ Department of Defence, [Tánaiste published Report of the Independent Review Group on Dignity and Equality issues in the Defence Forces](#) (2023).

⁶ Irish Examiner, [‘I was followed, mocked, threatened’: Stark findings in Defence Forces report](#) (2023)

⁷ IHREC, [State Must Take Action to Ensure Human Rights of Defence Force Personnel are Upheld](#) (2023)

violence, and a failure by the State to accept responsibility and ensure adequate redress.⁸ This report provides another example of the failings of the State in relation to institutional abuse, which the Independent Review Group notes is not historical abuse, but ongoing persistent and pervasive behaviour requiring “immediate and significant” action.

We are available to discuss the information presented in the report as required, and look forward to continued engagement with GREVIO during the next stages of this procedure and in subsequent evaluations.

Yours Sincerely,



Éimear Fisher
Acting Director
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

⁸ IHREC, [Ireland and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (2023), p. 21.